

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3317

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY SANAA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1582

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IZ, TU

SUBJ: DEPRIMIN HAYDAR EXPLAINS SYRIAN POSITION ON EUPHRATES
WATER CONFLICT

REF: BAGHDAD 0440

1. SUMMARY: DEPRIMIN HAYDAR DURING APRIL 28 CONVER-
SATION DELIVERED TIRADE AGAINST CURRENT IRAQI POLITICAL
CAMPAIGN OVER DIVISION OF EUPHRATES WATERS. ACCORDING
HAYDAR, ISSUE IS PURELY AND SIMPLY AN IRAQI DIVERSION TO
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COVER UP ITS CEDING OF ARABISTAN TO IRAN. SYRIA AND IRAQ

HAVE SPENT SEVENTEEN FRUITLESS YEARS IN TRYING TO NEGOTIATE SETTLEMENT. SYRIA WILL NOT AGREE ON WATER DISTRIBUTION SCHEDULE UNTIL IRAQ AGREES CONCLUDE TREATY, BUT IS WILLING TO SHARE WATERS ON EQUAL BASIS. WATER LEVEL LOW BECAUSE OF LIGHT RAINFALL, AND ONLY PLENTIFUL APRIL RAINS ALLEVIATED CRISIS AFFECTING SYRIAN AS WELL AS IRAQI PEASANTS IN EUPHRATES BASIN. INEFFICIENT IRAQI CANAL SYSTEM WASTES MUCH WATER. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING APRIL 28 MEETING WITH SYRIAN DEPRIMIN FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MUHAMMAD HAYDAR, I ASKED ABOUT PROGRESS OF MEDIATION ON ISSUE OF EUPHRATES WATER DISPUTE BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAQ. THIS UNLEASHED A HALF-HOUR TIRADE JUSTIFYING SARG POSITION AND PROTESTING IRAQI INABILITY CONCLUDE SENSIBLE EUPHRATES AGREEMENT WITH SYRIA DESPITE SARG WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE. FOLLOWING WERE HIS MAIN POINTS.

3. ARABISTAN: HAYDAR ASSERTED IRAQ USING EUPHRATES WATER ISSUE TO DISTRACT IRAQI PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM GOI'S "UNPOPULAR" DECISION RELINQUISH ARAB CLAIMS TO ARABISTAN WITHIN CONTEXT IRAQI-IRAN TREATY. IRAQ HAD NO RIGHT TO SURRENDER ARAB LAND. IT SHOULD HAVE FOLLOWED SYRIA'S EXAMPLE CONCERNING ALEXANDRETTA (ISKANDERUN), MAINTAINING EXTENSIVE RELATIONS WITH TURKEY BUT NEVER ACKNOWLEDGING LOSS OF ALEXANDRETTA PROVINCE, MUCH LESS SURRENDERING ITS CLAIMS TO TERRITORY COMPLETELY.

4. EUPHRATES TREATY: DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD HAVE NEGOTIATED UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR SEVENTEEN YEARS OVER EUPHRATES WATERS. "MOST OF THE ORIGINAL NEGOTIATORS ARE ALREADY DEAD, AND IT IS HIGH TIME TO REACH AN AGREEMENT FOR SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN." LAST DECEMBER IRAQI IRRIGATION MINISTER CAME TO DAMASCUS BUT WAS "UNWILLING CONDUCT SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS" AND WOULD NOT SET DATE FOR FURTHER MEETING. HAYDAR STATED THAT EUPHRATES WATER FLOW WAS SHORT THIS YEAR, PARTICULARLY DURING MARCH, THOUGH APRIL RAINFALL PARTIALLY ALLEVIATED CRISIS THROUGHOUT EUPHRATES BASIN. IRAQ, HOWEVER, NOW ASKING FOR MORE WATER THAN ENTIRE QUANTITY WHICH HAS RECENTLY

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BEEN REACHING SYRIA FROM TURKEY. IRAQI INFOMIN HAMMADI DRAWS ATTENTION TO THREE MILLION IRAQI PEASANTS WHOSE EXISTENCE THREATENED BUT CONVENIENTLY IGNORES SUFFERING OF OVER ONE MILLION SYRIAN PEASANTS WHO ALSO LIVE BELOW DAM. IRAQ WANTS TO DISCUSS ONLY A WATER DISTRIBUTION SCHEDULE WHILE SYRIA WANTS DISCUSSION TO BE ON BASIS OF CONCLUDING FORMAL AGREEMENT ON OVERALL RIGHTS TO EUPHRATES WATERS AMONG RIVERINE COUNTRIES. IN THIS CONTEXT SYRIA

WOULD BE WILLING TO DIVIDE WATERS WITH IRAQ ON EQUAL BASIS, BUT ONLY AFTER JOINT TECHNICAL TEAMS ESTABLISH EXACT QUANTITIES FLOWING ACROSS TURKISH BORDER. IRAQIS CLAIM TURKEY HAS GRANTED THEM "EXTRA HUNDRED MILLION CUBIC METERS (SIC)", BUT IN ABSENCE IRAQ-SYRIAN AGREEMENT, WHOSE SHARE THIS ULTIMATELY COMES FROM IS UNCLEAR.

5. IRAQI AND SYRIAN NEEDS: HAYDAR SAID THAT IN LAST FEW YEARS IRAQ HAS HASTILY DOUBLED ITS TRADITIONAL AREA OF 700-800,000 HECTARES IRRIGATED BY EUPHRATES AND NOW CLAIMS NEED FOR EXTRA WATER TO IRRIGATE NEW AREA. ITS DEEP WATER IRRIGATION CANAL SYSTEM IS ALSO VASTLY INEFFICIENT. SYRIA, FOR ITS PART, INFORMED IRAQ FIVE YEARS AGO OF ITS INTENTION TO INCREASE AREA UNDER IRRIGATION IN BASIN FROM 200,000 HECTARES TO 640,000 HECTARES. SINCE PROJECT WILL TAKE ANOTHER 15 YEARS TO COMPLETE, IRAQ CAN BENEFIT WITHOUT PAYING FOR WATER WHICH SYRIA NOT YET UTILIZING.

6. CURRENT SITUATION: IRAQ CLAIMS IT NEEDS 350 MILLION CUBIC METERS. IT IS TRUE THAT IN RECENT MONTHS IRAQ HAS RECEIVED WATER AT RATE OF ONLY 200 MILLION CUBIC METERS FROM TABQA DAM BUT THIS IGNORES ADDITIONAL 100 MILLION CM WHICH IRAQ NORMALLY RECEIVES FROM TRIBUTARIES BELOW DAM AS WELL AS FROM RAINFALL FEEDING RIVER ITSELF.

7. ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION: HAYDAR NOT OPTIMISTIC ON SUCCESS ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION ATTEMPTS. ASSERTED SOLUTION OF DISPUTE ONLY REQUIRED IRAQ TO CALL OFF ITS PROPAGANDA ATTACKS AND SEND NEGOTIATORS TO CONCLUDE OVERALL TREATY ON DIVISION OF WATERS. NEITHER COUNTRY HAD RECEIVED SATISFACTORY ANSWERS TO ATTEMPTS AT CONFIDENTIAL

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NEGOTIATION WITH TURKEY. FOR PRESENT SYRIA HAS REINFORCED ITS TROOPS AT TABQA DAM TO GUARD AGAINST IRAQI SABOTAGE OR "IF THEY WANT WAR." RE SAUDI MEDIATION, HAYDAR WAS NON-COMMITTAL, COMMENTING IT IRONIC "TWO PROGRESSIVES HAD TO TURN TO A REACTIONARY."

8. COMMENT: VEHEMENCE OF HAYDAR'S COMMENTS SUGGESTS THAT CURRENT ARAB MEDIATION EFFORTS ON THIS ISSUE FACE UPHILL STRUGGLE ALTHOUGH SAG MINISTER YAMANI HAS HAD TWO MEETINGS WITH ASAD WHICH DEPONMIN RAFAI HAS CHARACTERIZED AS "HELPFUL." ISSUE IS TECHNICALLY COMPLICATED AND ALSO POLITICALLY EXPLOSIVE OWING TO INTENSE RIVALRY BETWEEN COMPETING WINGS OF THE BAATH. MURPHY

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